

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ARTICLE ON PANAMA IN MAY 17 WASHINGTON POST

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF ARTICLE BY MARLISE SIMONS RE CANAL
NEGOTIATIONS IN POST TODAY:

2. BEGIN TEXT: PANAMA CITY, MAY 16--A BREAKTHROUGH IN THE
PANAMA CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS IS CONSIDERED NEAR, AS
PANAMA MOVES CLOSE TO ACCEPTING U.S. DEMANDS FOR A CON-
TINUING ROLE IN DEFENDING THE WATERWAY AFTER IT PASSES
UNDER PANAMANIAN CONTROL. IN A LENGTHY INTERVIEW, PANAMA'S;
STRONGMAN BRIG. GEN. OMAR TORRIJOS SAID, "PANAMA CAN AC-
CEPT THE U.S. RIGHT TO INTERVENE AGAINST A THIRD COUNTRY TO
PROTECT THE NEUTRALITY OF THE CANAL. ABOVE ALL, THIS IS
WHAT OUR LATIN AMERICAN NEIGHBORS AND ALLIES DEMAND. TO
A GREAT EXTENT THEIR ECONOMIES DEPEND ON THE FREEDOM OF
PASSAGE." THE FORMULA DEFINING THE TERMS OF THE CANAL'S
NEUTRALITY HAS BEEN THE MAIN OUTSTANDING POINT IN THE LATEST
AND SUPPOSEDLY LAST ROUND OF DISCUSSION ABOUT THE BASIC
ISSUES. AGREEMENT ON THE NEUTRALITY CLAUSE IS BELIEVED,
THEREFORE, TO CLEAR THE WAY FOR THE NEW TREATY, WHICH HAS
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BEEN THE CAUSE OF CONSIDERABLE TENSION BETWEEN THE TWO
COUNTRIES SINCE 1964.

UNTIL NOW PANAMA'S OFFICIAL NEGOTIATING POSITION HAS BEEN
THAT UNDER THE NEW TREATY THE UNITED NATIONS SHOULD ACT AS
;UARANTOR OF THE WATERWAY'S NEUTRALITY. WASHINGTON,

HOWEVER, WANTS A BILATERAL GUARANTEE INVOLVING A CONSIDERABLE U.S. ROLE. EVEN IF PANAMA IS NOW ACCEPTING AT LEAST IN PART--WASHINGTON'S MOST CRUCIAL DEMAND, THE WORDING OF THE NEUTRALITY IS STILL A DELICATE POINT THAT MAY SET OFF NEW AND LENGTHY DISCUSSIONS. ACCORDING TO TORRIJOS, THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT WILL BE HAMMERING OUT ITS ANSWERS TO A NEW SET OF U.S. PROPOSALS TODAY. THIS MORNING THE PANAMANIAN NEGOTIATING TEAM AND THE COUNTRY'S TOP MILITARY AND CIVILIAN OFFICIALS ARRIVED AT HIS HOME IN FARALLON, AFTER HOLDING TALKS AMONG THEMSELVES THIS WEEKEND. THEY WERE TO RETURN TO WASHINGTON TONIGHT TO RESUME THE TALKS ON TUESDAY MORNING. TORRIJOS DECLINED, HOWEVER, TO DISCLOSE DETAILS OF THE PANAMANIAN POSITION, ADDING, "I CAN SAY WHAT WE DO NOT WANT. WE WILL NOT ACCEPT ANYTHING IN WRITING THAT CAN JUSTIFY AN AMERICAN INTERVENTION IN THE FUTURE." TORRIJOS WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE NEW U.S. PROPOSALS BROUGHT HOME BY HIS NEGOTIATING TEAM WERE "VERY GOOD," AND PROVED TO BE A POSITIVE TURN IN THE TENSE SITUATION THAT AROSE DURING THE TALKS IN WASHINGTON LAST WEEK. A PROBLEM AROSE THEN THAT ALMOST LED "TO A BREAKOFF OF THE TALKS," HE SAID. ON WEDNESDAY, ACCORDING TO TORRIJOS, THE U.S. NEGOTIATING TEAM SUDDENLY PRODUCED NEW DEMANDS ON POINTS ALREADY AGREED ON. "SO I TOLD MY PEOPLE 'THIS IS NO STRIPTEASE, WE CAN'T ACCEPT THIS. TELL THE AMERICANS THAT IF WE WANT TO REACH AN AGREEMENT WE SHOULD ALL GET UNDRESSED TOGETHER.'" TORRIJOS THEN REPORTEDLY INSTRUCTED HIS REPRESENTATIVE TO RETURN TO PANAMA IN 48 HOURS IF THE U.S. "DID NOT STOP FOOLING AROUND." "THE AMERICANS BUGGED THE TELEPHONE SO UNCLASSIFIED

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THEY MUST HAVE HEARD US," SAID TORRIJOS. "THE NEXT DAY THEY CAME UP WITH THESE POSITIVE PROPOSALS." SEASONED OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE THAT PANAMA'S REFERENCE TO THE WILL OF ITS LATIN AMERICAN NEIGHBORS MAY PROVIDE IT WITH THE FACE-SAVING DEVICE IT WILL NEED TO ACCEPT A U.S. DEFENSE ROLE. TORRIJOS' INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO WIN SUPPORT IN HIS EFFORTS TO GET CONTROL OVER THE U.S.-OWNED CANAL HAS INCLUDED REGULAR CONSULTATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICA'S FOUR CIVILIAN GOVERNMENTS: COSTA RICA, COLOMBIA, MEXICO AND VENEZUELA, WHICH HAVE CONSISTENTLY ADVOCATED HIS CAUSE. "THESE FOUR PRESIDENTS HAVE BURNED THEIR SHIPS FOR ANOTHER MAN'S CAUSE," TORRIJOS SAID. "IT IS ONLY JUST THAT THEY GIVE THEIR OPINION. FOR EXAMPLE, THEY ARE NOW BEING SENT THE MINUTES OF OUR MEETING WITH THE AMERICANS." ACCORDING TO TORRIJOS, THE "RIGHTIST MILITARY REGIMES OF THE SOUTHERN CONE ARE PUSHING US THE

OTHER WAY AND SAYING THAT THE UNITED STATES IS ALREADY GIVING AWAY TOO MUCH. WE MAY NOT LIKE AN AMERICAN ROLE,

BUT WE WILL HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO KEEP THE PEACE WITH THE
REST OF THE CONTINENT." END TEXT. CHRISTOPHER

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